

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 *The Need for a Downtown Circulator*

In recent years, there have been numerous proposals for a new circulation system in the core area of the District of Columbia. These have included National Park Service proposals for visitor transportation systems as well as circulation systems for downtown workers. Numerous reasons have been presented for implementing the various proposed circulator services. The major reasons can be summarized as:

- Visitor Mobility
- Downtown Worker Mobility
- Economic Development
- Congestion Relief
- Homeland Security Restriction Mitigation

**Visitor Mobility** - Washington, D.C. attracts approximately 22 million visitors annually, with many spending nearly their entire visit along the National Mall. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metrobus and Metrorail services connect the Mall with surrounding parts of the city and the larger metropolitan region, but they do not provide transit services for trips within the Mall area. Private tour buses, including the National Park Service Tourmobile concession, provide guided tours and attractions-based transportation along on the Mall, but do not provide basic transit connections from the Mall to the rest of the city. Tourmobile and the other tour bus services serve a segment of the market seeking leisurely guided tours, but attract a relatively small share of the overall tourist market in the area. The remainder of the tourists drive cars, walk more than they would like, skip destinations that are hard to get to, and otherwise get around through a varied assortment of means of transportation.

There is a need for a coherent visitor transportation system that is not being met by the current mix of private tour companies and public transit services. In order to attract a large share of the visitor market, visitors will need a transportation system that is clearly "the way" to get around the center of the Nation's Capital, regardless of the purpose of their trip. Visitors are not simply guests in someone else's city. This is their capital city, and Washington has an obligation to provide the services visitors need to fully experience their capital. Visitors need an efficient, inexpensive means of transportation that is easy to understand and serves a comprehensive set of visitor destinations.

**Downtown Worker Mobility** - Adjacent to the National Mall and the Monumental Core area lies the District of Columbia's downtown. While the area has declined in importance as a retail center in recent decades, it remains a large concentration of federal government and private offices. Thousands of federal workers and other employees work in the area and make short trips within the area during the course of the day for meetings, shopping, dining, and entertainment. Metrorail is not suited for such short trips. Metrobus serves some downtown corridors but tends to serve commuter trips better than short local trips. Many downtown

workers end up using their cars or taxis for short trips, or choose not to travel beyond a short walk. Numerous federal agencies have found the need to operate their own shuttle van service between various office locations to serve the need for local business travel by federal employees.

There is a need for a downtown transportation system that is not being met by existing transit services. Federal and non-federal workers need a transportation system that is a fast, efficient, inexpensive means of transportation for short trips within the downtown. Federal agencies would benefit from a system that allows them to avoid having to provide transportation services and lets them focus on their agency's mission.

**Economic Development** - While the downtown is a place where downtown workers shop, dine, and are entertained, the existing transportation system does little to encourage visitors to take advantage of businesses in the downtown. The lack of a visitor transportation system that brings visitors into and through the downtown discourages visitors from exploring much of the city outside the Monumental Core. The recently completed Convention Center will attract many visitors to the edge of the downtown area, but no visitor-oriented transportation systems exist to allow them to explore the downtown, or even access the traditional visitor attractions.

There is a need for a transportation system that connects the visitor attractions, the downtown, and the convention center. The same system that visitors use to explore the Mall and the traditional visitor attractions should be there to allow them to explore the downtown and other parts of the center of the city. Such a system will encourage a new economic vitality downtown, enhance the visitor experience, and encourage visitors, particularly conventioners, to stay longer and explore the city, providing additional dollars to the region's economy.

**Congestion** - The National Mall, the other visitor attractions, and the downtown form the core of a major American city. This high concentration of government, commercial, and tourist activity naturally brings roadway congestion. As in any major city, viable alternatives to the automobile are required for the city to avoid being strangled by congestion. Washington's congestion is worsened by the number of tour buses operating along the Mall. Tour buses along and adjacent to the Mall are often found double-parked while waiting for passengers. This also has significant negative environmental and aesthetic impacts to the Mall area.

There is a need for a better circulator system within the National Mall area that will allow visitors and downtown workers to avoid automobile use. A better visitor circulation system will give tour bus operators an additional option of using the circulator to augment their service, while keeping some tour buses away from the Mall.

**Homeland Security** - An increased concern over homeland security in recent years has had negative impacts on the transportation system in downtown Washington. Several streets in the vicinity of the White House, the Capitol, and the State Department have been restricted from full traffic. Numerous other streets have had parking eliminated due to security concerns. The reduction in roadway and parking capacity as a result of these federal restrictions has increased travel times and congestion. This makes automobile use even more difficult than it would otherwise have been, and increases the need for transit services that are alternatives to automobile use in the downtown.

There is a need for a transit circulation system in the downtown area that will not only encourage less automobile use, but that could possibly make use of restricted roadways and former parking lanes to avoid delays that have been introduced by the restrictions. This could be an effective

means for the federal government to mitigate the impacts of the restrictions that have been imposed on the local transportation system in order to protect key federal facilities.

Thus, there are numerous needs that could be met by a Downtown Circulator in the core area of Washington, DC. A Downtown Circulator can serve both visitors and downtown workers. It can address needs for visitor transportation, local travel within the downtown, and visitor travel into the downtown area. The city could benefit through reduced congestion and support for economic development in the downtown. The federal government could benefit through improved services for visitors to federal facilities, reduced congestion on the Mall, reduction in costs and administration of federal shuttle van services, and mitigation of the negative impacts resulting from restrictions imposed by federal security measures.

## **1.2 Goals for the Circulator**

Given this need for a Downtown Circulator, the Downtown Circulator Partner Group (DCPG) was formed to oversee the implementation of the project. Development of this Implementation Plan for the Downtown Circulator was guided and funded by the four key DCPG agencies:

- National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC)
- District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT)
- Downtown Business Improvement District (DBID)
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)

The DCPG hired Multisystems, Inc. (assisted by DMJM+Harris), as the consultant to develop this Implementation Plan.

Considering the identified needs, the DCPG outlined several goals for the project:

- **Improve connectivity between the Monumental Core and the Central Business District**
  - Provide a convenient service utilizing an attractive and distinctive vehicle for trips between the Monumental Core and the Central Business District
  - Provide frequent service between the Monumental Core and the Central Business District
  - Improve transit travel times for trips between the Monumental Core and the Central Business District
- **Mitigate federal security measures**
  - Provide east-west transit service along Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House to mitigate the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue
  - Provide a service to accommodate trips impacted by the elimination of parking near federal facilities
- **Circulate visitors within the Monumental Core**
  - Provide a convenient service utilizing an attractive and distinctive vehicle for trips between visitor attractions

- Provide frequent service for trips between visitor attractions
- Improve travel time for trips between visitor attractions
- Provide an affordable service for trips between visitor attractions
- **Enable downtown workers to make business and shopping trips**
  - Provide a convenient service for short trips within the downtown
- **Supplement Metrobus and Metrorail**
  - Provide transit services that supplement Metrorail and Metrobus by providing a distributor service from downtown regional transit hubs
- **Reduce private automobile and tour bus congestion**
  - Provide an alternative means of transportation within the Monumental Core and Central Business District, reducing congestion and decreasing the need for automobile parking
  - Provide an alternative means of transportation within the Monumental Core and Central Business District for visitors arriving via tour bus

These goals guided the development of this Implementation Plan

### ***1.3 The Implementation Plan***

The study area for the Implementation Plan is shown in Figure 1-1. The area includes the traditional downtown area and the Monumental Core of Washington DC. It also includes the newer downtown along K Street and around Farragut Square, and extends to Georgetown to the northwest, and south to the southwest waterfront. The limits of the study area are roughly the Potomac River, the western and northern limits of Georgetown, Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Street NE and SE, D Street SE and SW, and 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW.

This Implementation Plan includes an Analysis of the Market for the Circulator, an Operations Plan, a Fare Structure Plan, a Capital Plan, a Financial Plan, and a Marketing Plan. These are presented in the subsequent sections following a section presenting background information for the study.